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Book Reviews

The Formation of the New Testament. By GEORGE HOOPER FERRIS, Philadelphia: Griffith & Rowland Press, 1907. Pp. 281. \$0.90.

Rev. George H. Ferris, A. M., a Baptist minister of Philadelphia, has written a book, *The Formation of the New Testament*, and the American Baptist Publication Society has published it. In it the author has endeavored "to trace the conflict between the early principle of an 'open vision' and the ecclesiastical principle of a 'closed canon,' trying to avoid the confusion of thought that comes from a failure to keep the two ideas distinct." He has succeeded. He has given the results of his study in clear flexible English, that never declines and never wearies the reader. This is a piece of excellent theological writing.

In the opening chapter he shows us that a New Testament church is a church without a New Testament. It was the same tendency which manifested itself in the closing of the canon that afterward issued in the authoritative hierarchy, the authoritative pope, of the Roman Catholic church. The author explains that there was a felt need of a canon because the church had to deal with the speculative aberrations of the converted Greek philosophers, the non-speculative aberrations of Marcion, and the irresponsible religious enthusiasms of the Montanists. Doubtless a canon was a necessity. But the author cannot but deplore the necessity, and he has no confidence in the critical ability, and scant confidence in the sincerity, of the Fathers who made the selection. Apostolic authorship was deemed the necessary condition of the reception of a book into the Canon. The Acts of the Apostles was invoked by Irenaeus in order to prove that Paul was authorized by the apostles at Jerusalem. Gal. 2:5 was changed by them to the extraordinary reading, "For an hour I gave place by subjection." So upon the authority of the Jerusalem apostles, the Pauline writings were accepted. And Hebrews was finally accepted only as being Pauline. Altogether the reasons for the formation of the canon lay in the desire of the hierarchy to secure a norm of speculative homogeneity. This norm was apostolicity or apostolic appointment. As apostolic authorship gave authority to the books, so also the books in turn supported the claims of the hierarchy to apostolic foundation. And as the author hates a hierarchy, he does not love a canon. On p. 103 he says:

The baneful and pernicious notion that every doctrine and every practice of the church must somehow find apostolic authority, even if it must twist passages out of their context in order to do it, and find marvelous absurdities in numbers and trivial objects, like shoe-laces and whip-cords, utterly destroyed the sense of perspective in the gospels, and led the church away from the great spiritual and ethical message of its Master. So far did it wander that it has not yet returned. The idea is still widely current that the church must carry back all its customs, beliefs, and institutions to the apostolic age.

But neither did the church of the second century love a canon. At least the Alogi did not, and they constituted a large and influential body within the church. They objected to the inclusion of the Apocalypse and the Fourth Gospel, and would have included the Gospel of Peter, or the Shepherd of Hermas, or the Egyptian Gospel. The author of our book is inclined to think that they were right—at least in what they would include. He believes that Christian theology throughout the history of the church has been compelled to follow more or less closely the allegorizing methods of interpretation of Irenaeus, because “the assumption that a complete system of doctrine is to be found in the Scriptures forces her to do it.”

But may not even a self-glorifying hierarchy find it to its interest to do some good deeds? For men who believe in the operation of divine law in the natural world there will be no difficulty in holding that even though the formal determination of the canon was the work of a hierarchy, it was under the guidance of the Spirit of God. And, broadly speaking, the consensus of the church did find its expression in the decree of the Third Council of Carthage in 397.

With the historical statement of the ways whereby the canon originated there can be no fault found. It is true and convincing. But it is scarcely fair to say, as Mr. Ferris has said of writers upon the subject of the canon generally, “(they) contented themselves with an investigation into the history of the accepted books, and by showing that these books were considered sacred and authoritative long before a definite collection was made, they endeavored to prove the existence of a New Testament from the very beginning of the Christian era.” This is not the method of the two most recent American writers upon the canon, Professor Edward C. Moore, in his *The New Testament in the Christian Church*, and Professor Caspar René Gregory, in his *Canon and Text of the New Testament*. Nor is it the method of the late Bishop Westcott in his work *On the Canon of the New Testament*. Indeed Bishop Westcott has told us that there is no sharp dividing line between canonical and non-canonical scriptures.¹ But to say

¹ *Christus Consummator*, p. 7.

this is a very different thing from proposing to set the Epistle of Barnabas side by side with—or before—the Epistle to the Hebrews, and give Clement's Epistle and the Didache a place in the teaching of the church. When the author proposes this he has left the ground of historical investigation and will not find many followers. Few, however, will withhold their assent when, at the close of his discussion, he asks, "What, then, is the secret of the remarkable influence of the New Testament?" and answers "Christ."

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SAN FRANCISCO THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

The Early Traditions of Genesis. By PROFESSOR A. R. GORDON. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907. Pp. 348. \$2.25.

In this very readable and at the same time scholarly book, Professor Gordon has given us a valuable contribution on an already much studied theme. He sets for himself the task of estimating afresh the value of the early Hebrew traditions in the light of modern research and aims to ascertain their real character and significance. The emphasis is laid upon their moral and religious character wherein lies their permanent value.

Professor Gordon begins with a careful analysis of the documents in which he discriminates between an older nucleus used by J and various later Jahvistic traditions, the secondary J document and the P document. In the second chapter he discusses the age and relation of the documents. He agrees with the generally accepted date—*circa* 850 B.C. or very shortly after—for the time when the J document took form, but believes it probable that the older nucleus should be dated as early as the reign of Solomon. The secondary element, known as J², shows close acquaintance with the chief cities of Babylonia and Assyria and also a somewhat detailed knowledge of Babylonian traditions, and since the narrative is most likely Judean in origin, it is dated shortly after 735–734 B.C. when the compact of Ahaz with Tiglath-Pileser III drew the southern kingdom into the maelstrom of Assyrian politics. This narrative, however, could hardly have been written after the invasion of Sennacherib (701 B.C.) which roused strong opposition to Assyrian influence. P, showing intimate knowledge of and literary dependence upon Babylonian traditions, was composed by priestly writers in Babylonia shortly before 444 B.C.

The author then proceeds to investigate by the comparative method the sources of these traditions. Starting with the story of the Flood, he points out the close resemblances which clearly show that the biblical narratives